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THE OUZEL FIRE

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Where did it burn?

If you hike to Calypso Cascades (2 miles ahead) and Ouzel Falls (3 miles) you will encounter sectors of the Ouzel Burn. Under the National Park Service Fire Management Policy in Rocky Mountain National Park, lightning-caused fires in low risk zones above 10,000 feet in elevation are allowed to burn with careful monitoring. On August 9, 1978 lightning ignited a fire near Ouzel Lake. It smoldered and moved very slowly while being carefully monitored by rangers studying the effects of natural fire. When high winds fanned the fire into a rapidly moving blaze, measures were taken to bring the fire under control.

When are fires extinguished in Rocky Mountain National Park?

The Park service puts out man-caused fires as quickly as possible.

Lightning-caused fires may be allowed to burn within certain zones but are put out immediately when: 1) they endanger human life or buildings, 2) they threaten to escape the park, 3) they threaten rare or endangered species of plants or animals, 4) they threaten to destroy an entire ecosystem, 5) they burn erratically, or 6) too many fires occur at one time.

Why are some lightning-caused fires allowed to burn?

Although it was once thought that fire had no role in the forest, it is now recognized that natural fire has always been a part of some forest communities. Fire can help recycle nutrients into the soil and open up the forest for a greater variety of plants and wildlife. Some plant species such as the lodgepole pine and quaking aspen actually rely on fire or some other disturbance for conditions that favor their growth.

A chance to observe forest succession

The trail to Ouzel Falls passes through some areas of the Ouzel Burn. As you hike up the trail, compare the burned sections with the unburned. A raw swatch of newly burned forest may seem ugly and barren, but new vitality and growth already have begun the process of forest succession. Changes will occur over the years as one type of plant community alters the burned area preparing the way for different types of plant communities.

The National Park Service recognizes that the presence or absence of natural fire is one of the ecological factors contributing to the perpetuation of native ecosystems. So, there may be occasions this summer when forest fires started during thunderstorms will be allowed to burn, if certain prescribed conditions are met. Rather than a "let burn" policy, it is one of fire management.

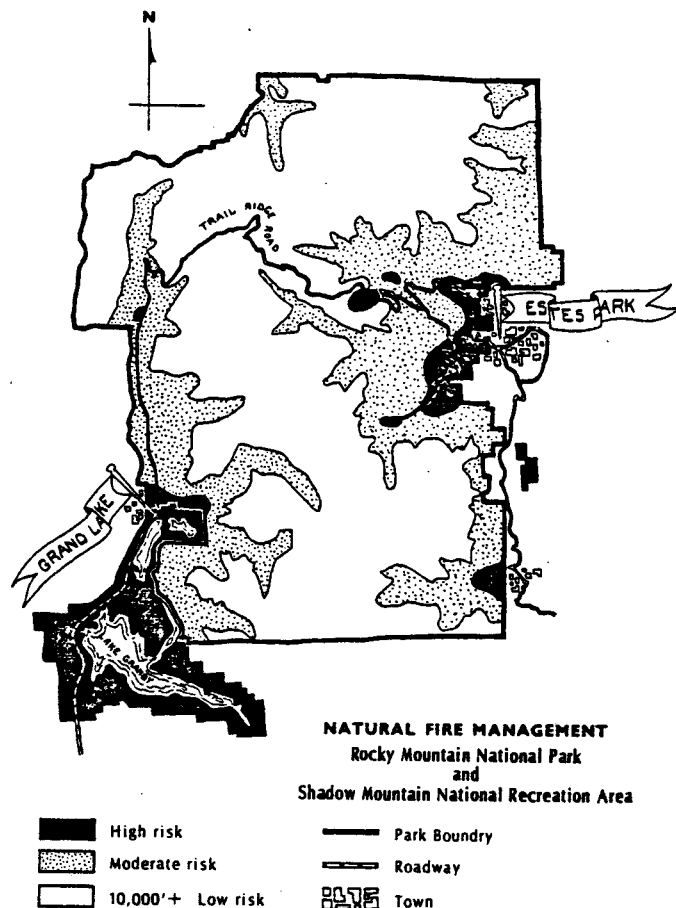
In the subalpine forest ecosystem, spruces and firs mantle the deeper soils, primarily on areas that have long been fire-free. Fire is an infrequent factor within this ecosystem. Periodically, however, fires do occur and drastic changes in composition are brought about. Lodgepole pine replaces the spruce-fir; on some sites, aspen enters the stands.

In the montane forest ecosystem, the vegetation consists of both ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir stands, interspersed with areas of grasslands and sagebrush or bitterbrush stands. Fire has played a much greater role here than in the other ecosystems within the Park. The fires kill off some of the brush species, stimulate sprout growth in others, and, in general influence the overall open park scene and plant composition. The fires of low intensity, such as occur in the montane forest, also help in seedbed preparation for the ponderosa pine stands by exposing mineral soil.

As a result of fire suppression within the park, relatively few young pine stands are found within the montane forests today.



There are seven functions of fire in a mixed-conifer forest that seem particularly significant. Fire (1) prepares a seedbed, (2) cycles nutrients within the system, (3) adjusts the successional pattern in various ways, (4) modifies conditions that favor wildlife, (5) influences the mosaic of age classes and vegetation types, (6) alters numbers of trees susceptible to attack by insects and disease, and (7) both reduces and creates fire hazards. Each of these roles is affected by fire intensity and frequency.



The map identifies the various natural fire management zones within the park. Three zones are identified:

**Low Risk Zone:** All naturally caused fires will be allowed to burn at elevations of 10,000 feet and above.

**Moderate Risk Zone:** Natural fires occurring below 10,000 feet will be allowed to burn only under prescribed burning indices.

**High Risk Zone:** All natural fires will be extinguished in developed areas or their vicinity.

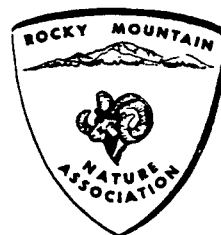
Man-caused fires will continue to be suppressed throughout the park. There will be certain conditions under which fire, even though it is of natural origin, will be extinguished as soon as possible. These conditions include (1) threatening of human life, (2) threatening of developments, (3) potential escape from park, (4) threatening of rare and endangered species, (5) destruction of an entire ecosystem, (6) erratic fire behavior, and (7) too many fires occurring at one time.

Other National parks and national forests in the Rocky Mountains are following similar policies where similar conditions exist. Fire is no longer considered the traditional enemy of the forest. Smokey, however, still advises to be careful with fire. While there are many

beneficial effects of fire when it is carefully and professionally used, there are also forest ecosystems that are not adapted to fire. Fire is a powerful force. Out of place – out of proportion, it could seriously damage valuable resources and endanger lives.

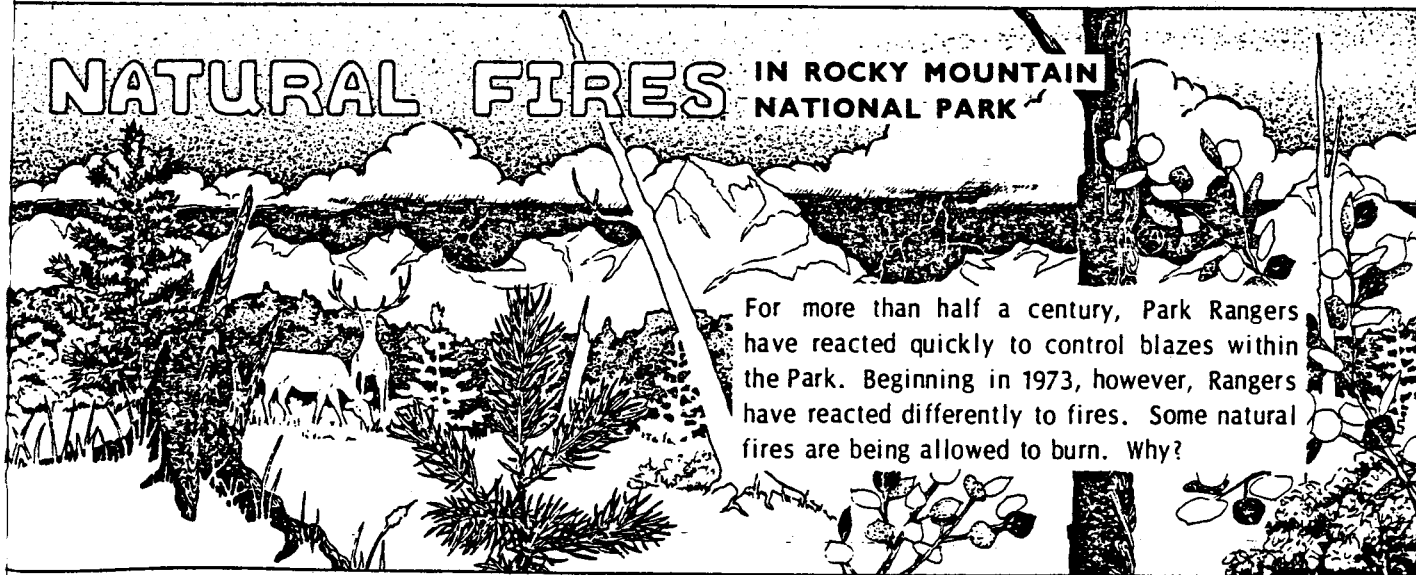


Published by the  
Rocky Mountain Nature Association, Inc.  
in cooperation with the  
National Park Service



5M 7/74  
Recycled Paper

## NATURAL FIRES IN ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK



For more than half a century, Park Rangers have reacted quickly to control blazes within the Park. Beginning in 1973, however, Rangers have reacted differently to fires. Some natural fires are being allowed to burn. Why?

## THE OUZEL LAKE FIRE

9/ 1978

On August 9, 1978, lightning struck about 100 feet from the Ouzel Lake Trail.

Four days later, on August 13, patrol ranger personnel reported the fire at Ouzel Lake. It was determined to be caused by lightning and was classified as a natural fire. Round the clock monitoring began, and a base camp was located by the outlet of Ouzel Lake.

For the next ten days the fire did little more than smoulder. It remained small in size with almost no rate of spread.

The fire flared up on August 23. It was of a creeping nature with intermittent crowning and with a maximum rate of spread of 4 feet per hour. There were flames on both sides of the Ouzel Lake trail.

The next day the fire picked up. Closure signs were posted for the Bluebird and Ouzel Lake trails, and backcountry sites in the area were closed.

For the next eight days the fire continued to creep slowly between Ouzel Creek and the Chickadee Pond area.

On September 1, high winds changed the character of the fire to a crowning condition. The fire, which was producing a lot of smoke, spread east along the Bluebird Lake trail and up the south-facing slope. The fire was declared a serious condition. Backcountry campers were moved out of the area, and it was decided to contain the fire along the east side and suppress all spot fires in the northeast corner.

On September 2, twenty-eight fire personnel began suppression activities along the east perimeter and on the hot spots down the slope in the northeast area. A base camp and tool cache were set up on the trail outside the east perimeter - four portable pumpers, 5000 feet of hose, and a 35-man tool cache.

The fire was reported to be in stable condition on September 4. The crew was reduced to twelve who continued to work on the few remaining hot spots.

Monitoring activities continued with two personnel on a 24-hour basis. The base camp and tool cache were left on location for suppression activities if needed.

By September 8, the fire was still creeping on the south side of the creek (north-facing slope) with occasional local crowning activity.

A twelve-man crew continued control activities in the east perimeter to establish a black line. The fire was essentially being mopped up along this perimeter.

Appreciable precipitation in the form of snow and rain was received on September 11.

On September 14, the burning index was 14, down from 24 on September 13 and 23 on September 12.

The following day, September 15, unpredictable winds from the west, with gusts of 20-30 mph caused the fire to burn with greater intensity on the

NOTES FROM BIFC PLANS - OUZEL FIRE

- Sept. 18 Day shift found 15 crews assigned to the fire. High winds developed and fire intensity picked up but resulted in zero spread.
- Shift objectives came within 20 chains of being met. 4 crews were placed on the fire (east end.)
- Sept. 19 Day shift had 17 crews on the line. Objective to continue mop-up in all sectors.
- Crews moved to YMCA and decision made not to put anyone on the line the next day.
- Sept. 20 Approximately 4 inches of snow on the fire. No crews on line. Attempt made to put retardant on hotspots using the 212 and 214. Effort was hampered but still managed to dump 12,000 gals.
- Webber stated that the fire was "temporarily contained due to snow," and that when it was remanned, it would then again be uncontained.
- Sept. 21 No crews put on the line again today.
- I.R. and Probeye reports a fair number of hot spots, or areas, that are still hot. The 212 and 214 were again used to dump retardant on hot spots, and delivered over 20,000 gals.
- Webber turned the fire over to Rex at 1800 hours, who will act as a trainee.
- A helispot constructed on Div. III for transportation of crews to that area.
- Sept. 22 15 crews returned to the fireline to continue mopping up the perimeter and locating spots outside the line. Six of the crews were shuttled in by the 212 to Div. III. Remaining crews bussed into the Wild Basin Ranger Station and Allenspark. The 212 and 214 continued to drop the retardant and water on the fire.
- Sept. 23 The 212 and 214 shuttled 6 crews to the helispot in Div. III. Both dropped retardant from 0900 until 1300 when the 212 went down for maintenance. Probeye confirmed all smokes the I.R. picked up and found a few more.
- Sept. 24 13 crews were put on the line again today. Cool weather and high R.H. allowed a good day on the fire. At 1500 hrs., the decision to release 11 crews, one helicopter and various overhead. It was also decided to turn the fire over to a Class II team from BIFC on 9/26/78, 0600 hours.

Sept. 25      Effective 0600 MDT, Sept. 25, Webber officially declared the Ouzel fire contained.

Sept. 26      As of 0600 Mr. Brooks delegated the responsibility of authority of the management of the fire to Bill Mitchell.

                Mr. Brooks approved helicopter trips for some residents of the Allenspark area to view the Ouzel fire.

                Mop-up efforts concentrated on selected hot spots. The 214 continued to drop wet water on the fire with good results.

                Most of the concentration was being put on Div. I and III.

Sept. 27      Priority for mop-up was placed on the south side of the fire on Div. III and along Finch Creek between Div. II and Div. I. Still using I.R. flights and Probeye for finding hot spots.

                Webber gave public relations talk to local civic leaders and briefing to Park Superintendent, etc. All surveyed the fire by helicopter to the HA--walked back to Wild Basin Ranger Station inspecting the fire as they went. The I.R. ship left today.

Sept. 28      Work continued on mop-up.  
Webber went home today.  
Still using Probeye.

Sept. 29      The 214 Bell shuttled two crews to HA and the BIFC-Park crew walked in from Wild Basin Ranger Station. Three people walked in from the Allenspark trailhead. All unused hoses and pumps will be brought down to the trail or helispot for transportation back to camp. Continued use of Probeye.

                Photographer from Christian Science Monitor to be taking pictures for an article she will write.

                At approximately 2:15 the Park got a report of a new fire (Pool). The Park requested use of the Hughes and Bell 214 for the rest of the day. They have ordered all our helicopter support equipment, cubitainers, fire shirts, bladder bags, pumps and other miscellaneous equipment for tomorrow.

Sept. 30      The 214 is unavailable until further notice.  
Mop-up and equipment retrieval.

Oct. 1        As of 1800 hrs., Oct. 1, Mitchell recommends that Jim Sweaney, NPS, Yellowstone, be designated Fire Boss. Mitchell released the two remaining suppression crews from USFS, Region 6.

Sweaney has requested that both helicopters stay along with their support. Mitchell agreed with this but recommended the 214 be released at the earliest convenience. Two members of the team volunteered to stay, at Sweaney's request, until qualified replacements can be found.

By mutual agreement, Mitchell and Sweaney declared the fire under control as of 1800 hours, 9/30/78. "This implies only that taking into consideration the fire behaviour, weather, etc., we feel that it has only a small possibility of spreading. A minimal patrol action will be necessary until considerable precipitation has been received."

As of 0600 hours, October 1, Brooks delegated authority to Sweaney as Fire Boss.

Oct. 16

As of 0600 October 17, the Superintendent delegated authority of the management of the mop-up of the subject Ouzel fire to Bob Seibert, Wild Basin Sub-district Ranger, Rocky Mountain National Park.

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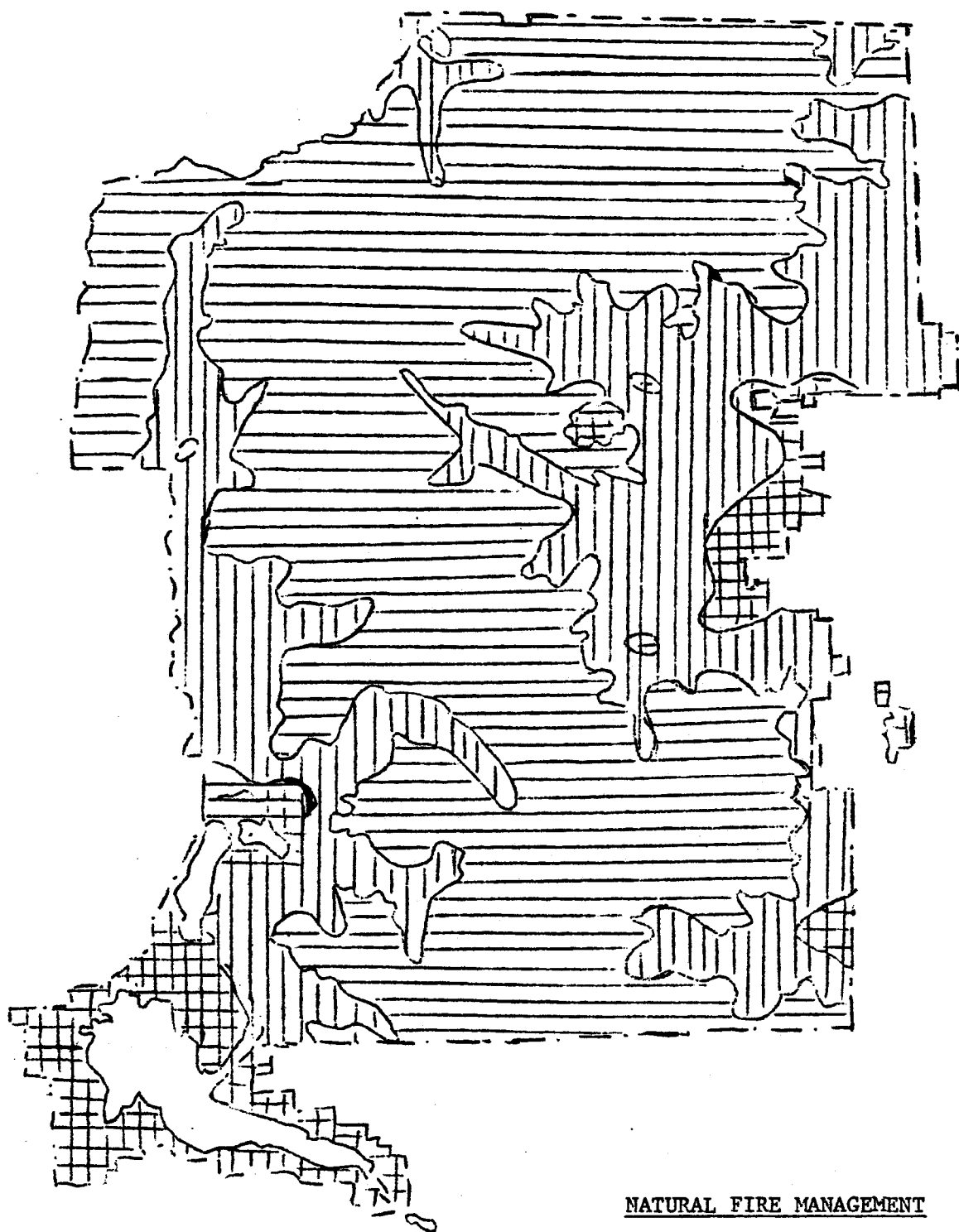
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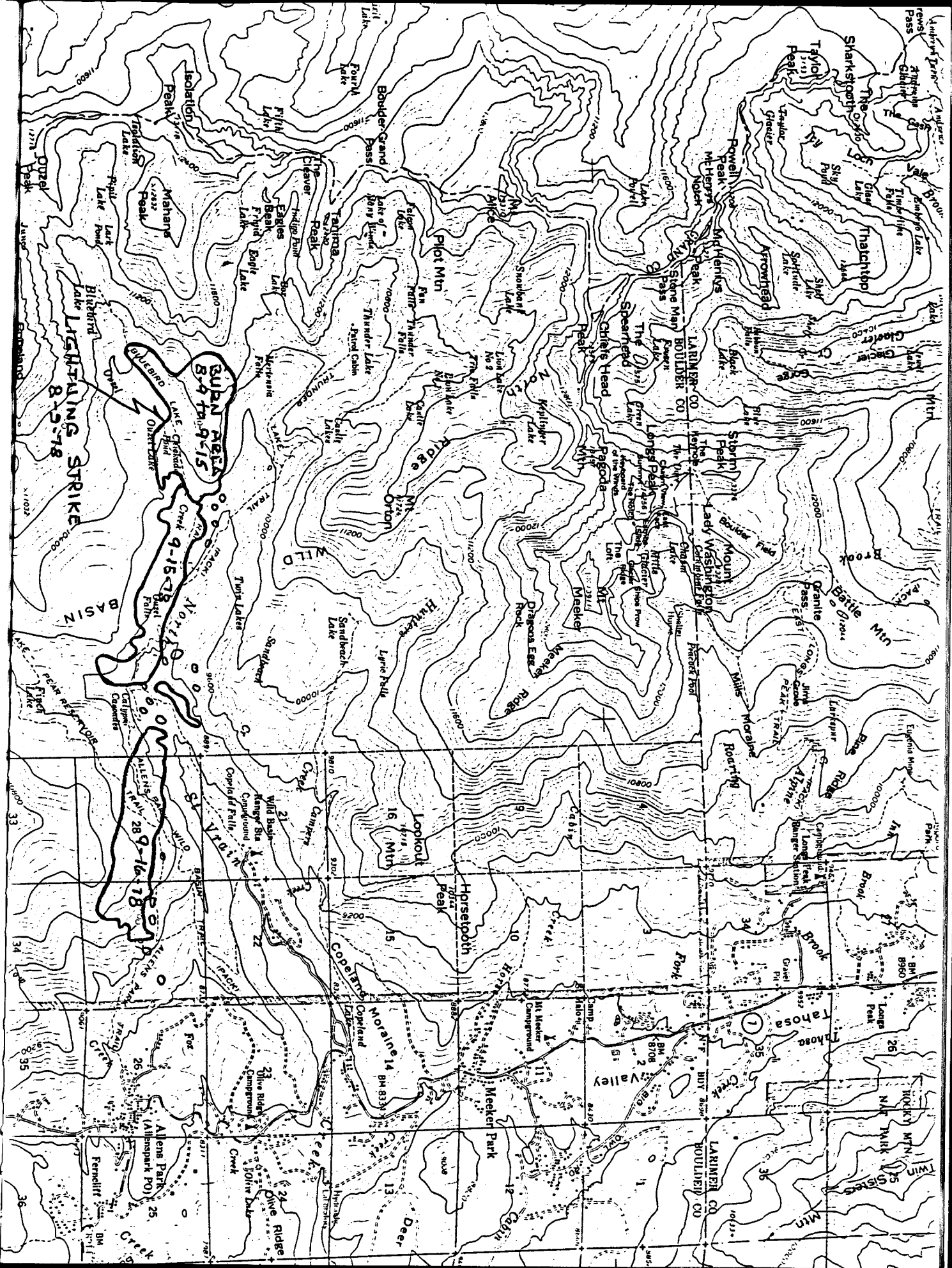
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# NATURAL FIRE MANAGEMENT

Rocky Mountain National Park  
and  
Shadow Mountain National Recreation Area  
Estes Park, Colorado 80517

- Park Boundary
- ▬ 10,000' +low risk
- ▮ Moderate Risk
- ▣ High risk



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Rocky Mountain National Park  
and  
Shadow Mountain Recreation Area  
Estes Park, Colorado 80517

August 25, 1978

NOTICE OF CLOSURE

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to the authority contained in Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 2.6(a), the following area is closed to all public use and travel until further notice:

1. The Ouzel Lake trail which extends between the Bluebird Lake trail and Ouzel Lake in Section 25, T3N, R74W.
2. The Ouzel Lake backcountry campsites in Section 25, T3N, R74W.

The purpose of the closure is to prevent injury to persons in connection with an on-going natural fire which was caused by lightning on August 9. As the fire is located in a natural fire management zone of low risk, it is being carefully monitored and managed as a means of (1) preparing a seedbed, (2) cycling nutrients within the system, (3) adjusting the successional pattern, (4) modifying conditions that favor wildlife, (5) influencing the mosaic of age classes and vegetation types, (6) altering the number of trees susceptible to attack by insects and disease, and (7) reducing future fire hazard.

Since front range weather patterns are unpredictable and Park visitors hike, ride, and camp in the area described above, the closure is necessary as a public safety measure.

Rangers will issue court citations when necessary to persons violating the terms of this closure.



Chester L. Brooks  
Superintendent

9/2/78

The Ouzel fire was started by lightning and was discovered on August 13th. Since that time National Park Service personnel have monitored the fire. Yesterday, heavy winds whipped up the fire and caused the fire to run up and over a moraine.

At 4:00 a.m. today five squads (35 persons) were dispatched to the fire. Our objective today is to suppress the portion of the fire which ran over the moraine in the St. Vrain drainage and to use whatever control measures necessary to contain the management fire to the Ouzel Creek drainage above 10,000'. The fire is not out of control. The smoke from the fire has been excessive because of the vegetative type in which the fire is burning and because of the heavy winds. Control activities today should reduce the smoke.

It is anticipated that this management fire will consume the fuels within its perimeter and extinguish itself in the near future.

Natural fire is beneficial to the native ecosystems. For example, the Ouzel fire is burning in a low risk zone of 10,000' and above. The native ecosystem at this elevation is primarily spruce-fir. Fire will probably result in the replacement of spruce-fir by small brush, aspen and lodgepole pine types which will appreciably benefit wildlife habitat and prevent the accumulation of deep duff and similar fuels.

Because of this fire, Bluebird and Ouzel Lake trails will be closed until further notice.

9/3/78

The Ouzel fire was started by lightning and was discovered on August 13th. Since that time National Park Service personnel have monitored the fire. Yesterday, moderate winds affecting the fire caused it to move west toward Bluebird Lake and higher elevations where it should soon begin to run out of fuel.

At 6:00 a.m. today five squads (35 persons) were dispatched to the fire. Our objective today is to suppress small spot fires on the Northeast corner of the burn in the St. Vrain drainage and to use whatever control measures necessary to continue to contain the management fire to the Ouzel Creek drainage above 10,000'. The fire is not out of control. The smoke from the fire has been excessive because of the vegetative type in which the fire is burning and because of the heavy winds. Control activities today should reduce the smoke.

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Because of this fire, Bluebird and Ouzel Lake trails will be closed until further notice. The perimeter of the Ouzel Fire encompasses approximately 50 acres.

9/4/78

The Ouzel fire was started by lightning and was discovered on August 13th. Since that time National Park Service personnel have monitored the fire. Yesterday, moderate winds affecting the fire caused it to move west toward Bluebird Lake and higher elevations where it should soon begin to run out of fuel.

Twelve fire control/fire management personnel are on the fire today. Our objective today is to suppress any spot fires which may develop outside the established perimeter of the burn in the St. Vrain drainage on the east flank of the fire and to use whatever control measures necessary to continue to contain the management fire to the Ouzel Creek drainage above 10,000'. The fire is not out of control. The smoke from the fire has been excessive because of the vegetative type in which the fire is burning and because of the heavy winds. Activities today should reduce the smoke.

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The perimeter of the Ouzel Fire encompasses approximately 100 acres.